

**Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B  
(July 22, 2012)**

**Like Sheep without a Shepherd**

This past Wednesday there was a wonderful story on the front page of the *New York Times* about Fr. Gerald Ryan. He is 92 years old, has been a priest for 67 years and is still running a parish in the South Bronx, New York. 92 years old and a priest for 67! That makes him 11 years older than I am and a priest 17 years longer. I don't know what I'll be able to do at age 92, but it certainly won't be anything like running a parish in the South Bronx. He is an extraordinary man, a wonderful priest, and a great role model for the rest of us as we continue to do the work of the Lord in this troubled church of ours.

Father Ryan says that his journey as a priest has been away from the formalities, trappings, and titles of the church, in search of a deeper meaning of the Gospel.

"I think I have come a long way from when I was ordained," he said. As a seminarian, he said, he liked the idea of saying Mass, hearing confessions, and being addressed as Father, but that was like a fairy tale. "It isn't about serving the church in the way you have envisioned, from the altar, and from the position of authority and power," he said. "But it is learning what human nature is, and what the struggles of people are. And where Jesus really is." *And where Jesus really is!*

Recently Fr. Ryan blessed the marriage of a couple who had been together for 40 years but had never been married in church. In his brief homily he said to them, "Jesus said the most important thing was love, but love isn't worth your finger if the person you love doesn't know that you love them. Love is being kind and understanding, and making the other person laugh and feel good. That's what we are talking about. Real love. Not from the mouth but from the heart."

My first reaction on reading this article was: how pleasant to read something pleasant and uplifting about a Catholic priest in the *New York Times* which has been almost daily publishing stories about priests involved in sexual scandals and bishops covering up for them. My second reaction

was: here is a priest who personifies what we are hearing in our readings today.

Jeremiah warns the leaders of the people – he calls them shepherds – to be sure they are taking proper care of the people. That is their greatest responsibility. Take care of the people. And in their care and concern they are to show the love of God. If they don't he says, the consequences for them – the shepherds – could be very serious.